

“When in Rome, do as the Romans do.”... an appropriate saying for studying the book of Romans, don't you think?

*Unless you set out to consciously rebel, it's natural, and sometimes it's **right**, for us to change aspects about ourselves, and our presentation, and our behaviour, depending on our location.*

When I was in my field year (during bible college), I had a 12 month placement, in a church in the suburbs of Brisbane... and part of the way through that placement, the permanent minister got together with me for a yarn, and he said “Now Michael, I expect you to change some of the things you do, when you're in this church:

- Firstly, I think you need to dress a bit better. You've been preaching in shorts and sand shoes, and that might be alright out in the bush, but that's not OK here. The people in **this** location, are professionals, and they get dressed up for work, and I expect that when you are taking a leadership role in this church, you'll be better dressed. I expect to see long trousers, and maybe even a tie.*
- And secondly, you've been taking your water bottle up, and drinking from that... While you're in this place, if you need water, take a **glass** of water up the front...*

I didn't think it mattered, but apparently it did...

Things change, depending on your location.

- *It's fine to wear your Pyjamas at home, it's **not** fine, to wear them in the work place.*
- *It's normal to walk the streets of the Gold Coast in your togs and thongs (the kind that you put on your feet, for anybody who's listening overseas), but it's not normal to wear your thongs in an RSL club.*
- *It's acceptable to have the rifle on the front seat of the ute when you're on the farm, but it's **not** acceptable for it to be there, when you're in town*
- *When we went to the US, we had to drive on the right side of the road, because we were in the US*
- *When we came back to Australia again, we had to drive on the left side of the road, because we were in Australia.*

And freedoms change as well, depending on where we are:

- *When we went through immigration (on that trip), we were not allowed to take photographs, because we were in immigration.*
- *When we went to Tonga, Sunday was a complete day of rest. You could be fined, if you were caught swimming on a Sunday, because we were in Tonga*
- *But if you went next door to the tourist resort, you **could** swim on a Sunday, because you were in a tourist resort, and they are exempt from that law*

- *When you're in debt, you can't just do whatever you like with your money, because you're in debt.*
- *When you're in the pool, you're not allowed to wee, because you're in the pool...*
- *But when you're in the river, you are allowed to wee, because you're in the river, and nobody's going to know anyway...*

Today, I want to talk about what it means to be “in” Christ – what it means for our freedoms – what it means for our responsibilities and what that means for us generally.

Paul, often uses the phrase, “in Christ”. And this is an important thing for us to comprehend: He locates us – not just “near” Christ – not just “with” Christ – not just “aligned with” or allied with Christ – not “connected” with Christ ... He locates us “in” Christ. We **once** used to be “in the world”, but now we are “in Christ” – we have changed localities.

And in the letter to the Romans, 13 times, Paul uses the designation “in Christ”, and it always refers to the Christian. A Christian, is located “in Christ”.

- You think you're in Australia – but you're in Christ.
- You think you're in St George – but you're in Christ.
- You think you're in church – but you're in Christ.

That's gotta be a pretty good place to be, isn't it?

We Australians have just filled out the census ... And it's very important to the statisticians, for us to identify our locality... Because over the next few years, they're going to be

crunching the numbers, and they'll be able to tell us, depending on our location:

- *our life expectancy;*
 - *the likely education outcomes of our children;*
 - *our likely income;*
 - *our expectation of developing some chronic diseases....*
- outcomes that we can expect, based on our location.*

Well, today we're going to discover, that it doesn't matter where we're located physically – there is something which transcends this – there is something which is **bigger** than our physical location. There is something which impacts **more** on our behaviour – it impacts **more** on our freedoms – it impacts **more** on our whole life and destiny, than any **physical** location ever could..... And that is to be located “in Christ”...

Righto, we're now into the central part of Paul's letter to the Romans. Up until now, Paul has been spelling out the human predicament. And he brings us to the conclusion “All men¹ are sinners (and the women say, “That's for sure”) Yeah, well that means you too, Ladies – it's got nothing to do with “gender”, and everything to do with “our humanity”... All have sinned. And our sin – our rebellion against God, means that we deserve to be punished.

In our discipleship classes on Wednesday nights, we're doing “Christianity Explored”, and this week, Rico Tice gave us a really good illustration.

On the top of the law court building in London, is a statue of Lady Justice. And in one hand, she holds a set of balancing scales, signifying the weighing up of a person, to judge their innocence, or their guilt... And in the other hand, she bears

the sword, to signify that the guilty will be punished. ... And justice demands punishment.

*But then he pans across to the top of a cathedral, to a cross. On judgment day, **we** will be weighed, to determine **our** innocence or guilt... and so far in Romans, we've learned that the judgment is a foregone conclusion – guilty... But the cross, is the place where Jesus, has already born our punishment....*

And we needed that... Even when we try to be good, **we** can't be good enough. We are held as slaves to sin. But in Christ, we die to sin, and we become alive to God. And so sin no longer has dominion over us....

But even so, last time I preached, in Chapter 7, we heard Paul expressing, the struggle that we all have – that we **try** to do good, but we just can't achieve it.

- “The things that I **don't** want to do, I do!”
- “The things I **do** want to do, I don't do!”
- I agree that God's law is good, because I want to keep it, but I just can't achieve it

And he cries out in his pain and frustration, “What a wretched man I am”.... It's like he's saying, “What hope is there for me???” And we've all been there, hey??? You want to be better than you are, don't you???

- Less angry
- Less selfish
- More loving
- More kind
- More righteous
- Less vindictive
- More truthful

- More generous
- More Godly

And we know this is how God wants us to be, but we fail...

And at the end of Chapter 7, Paul says: ²⁴ **Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?** (and it's like he just catches a glimpse of the answer to that question) ²⁵ **Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!** (there's the deliverance – Jesus Christ delivers us from death) **So then, I myself serve the law of God with my mind** (alright, he loves God's law – he knows that it's right, and he tries to be obedient), **but with my flesh I serve the law of sin.** (he can't achieve it)... What then is he left to do???? Is he simply left feeling guilty?

Well today, in Chapter 8, he gives us a bit-a-hope, that takes away guilt:

¹ **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

{can you say it with me?}

If we are in Christ, we will not be condemned... We can't keep all of the law – we can't achieve it... And there once was a time, when we **were** condemned. Because of our inability to keep all of the religious laws, and even the ten commandments, we **were** condemned... But not now. Now, there is **no** condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

WoHoo!!!... To be located in Christ, means to receive an immense freedom. Who wouldn't want that? Who **wouldn't** want to be "in Christ"???

Who wouldn't want to be in Christ?????? Most of the world... Isn't that peculiar... Most of the world, don't want to be "in Christ".

You see, to be in Christ, comes with freedom (sure enough), but it's a location that also requires repentance, responsibility and change.

What does it mean to be "in Christ"? If there is **no** condemnation for those who are in Christ, who is "in Christ"? And what are my responsibilities, because I am "in Christ"?

To be in Christ, means to **walk**, not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

And this is where a lot of people baulk... Paul paints this picture for us:

those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

V7 says: ⁷ For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Alright, to be “in Christ”, involves a renewal of the mind, and we’re going to hear more about that when we get to Chapter 12. But because we are in Christ, there is a shift that must take place, and it begins in our minds. We set our minds on things of the Spirit, instead of things of the flesh, and this involves a submission to God’s law.

Even when we come to faith in Jesus, there’s going to be a battle that takes place. In fact, it’ll probably even get worse than before you came to faith in Jesus – this battle between the flesh and the Spirit. What’s going to win? The flesh? Or the Spirit? – they’re opposed to each other ... Well, it depends on what we set our minds on.

Some people take that one verse (¹ *There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*) And they say “Right, once we believe in Jesus, it doesn’t matter what we do, there is no condemnation.” And they continue to walk in the way of the flesh – not realising that having their minds set on the flesh, is a sign that they’re not in Christ.

And in the extreme, I have even heard of the description of a “carnal Christian”, to describe someone who believes in Jesus, and so they reckon they’re saved, but they live according to the flesh, and definitely not according to the Spirit... Let me say, “Biblically, there is no such thing as a carnal Christian.”

Verse 7 says: ⁷... the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. ⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

Alright, there is nothing “Christian” about a so-called “carnal Christian”. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to Christ.

Let me divert for a moment: What is the sign of being a Christian?

The Jews thought that to be a Jew, the outwards sign was to be circumcised... but that wasn't it. God wanted it to be a matter of the heart – He said circumcise your heartsⁱⁱ.

And likewise, the sign of being a Christian, some people think “Baptism is the sign”. But it's not – the sign of being a Christian, is to be filled with Christ – to be filled with the Holy Spirit. To be “in Christ”, means that Christ is in us.

V¹³..... if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

Alright, let's put some legs on this. Knowing stuff is all very good and nice, but how do we apply it?

Well firstly, it begins with relationship, and I'm not going to spend much time on this today, because I want to devote the

whole message to that, next week – that God is our Father, and He adopts us as His children.

So, it begins with our relationship with God. We cannot walk according to the Spirit, if we have no relationship with God.... More on that next week. And it's very important.

Secondly, we focus on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. We owe it to Jesus. We have a debt to Himⁱⁱⁱ. He is our Lord. He is our Master. He gave us the gift of salvation, and we should never presume that we can ever pay Him back for that... But as His grateful children, we bow our knee before Christ, in submission to Him.

And thirdly, **because** Jesus is Lord, we obey Him. Jesus said: Matthew 22:37 ... **"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment.**

So, how do we love Him with our mind? We set our mind on things of the Spirit, rather than things of the flesh, and what we do will follow.

The day that I wrote this message, I had a craving of the flesh. I needed a break. But it was raining, and I couldn't go out and get on my push bike like I normally do when I need a break.

I came to a stop in my sermon writing, and I just didn't know where to take the message from where I was at... And my mind began to wander, and it went where it shouldn't go...

And I had a craving of the flesh, to do something I shouldn't do. And so I had to stop what I was doing. And I prayed "Lord, this craving that I have, is of the flesh, please set my mind on things of the Spirit." And I actually had to re-deploy myself, to another task – one where my mind wouldn't wander to where it shouldn't be...

To walk in the way of the Spirit, I had to get my mind off of things of the flesh...

You might be a bit materialistic. And have a craving to spend money on things you don't need... And with online shopping, it's very easy to feed that habit, and set our mind on things of the flesh, by browsing online.... And with a few key-strokes, we've bought another item we don't need...

What if next time you have that craving, you go to the compassion website instead, and you donate to the poor, and to Christian missionaries. Or, go to the "Open Doors" web site, and help support the persecuted church... And while you're there, browse online, and read the stories of persecuted Christians, and how the church is growing, in the midst of persecution, and pray for them... Just one way, of setting your mind on things of the Spirit, instead of things of the flesh...

One time, a lady approached her minister, and said, "Does God require me to give up smoking?" And he answered her, "Well Madam, that depends: For you, is smoking a craving of the flesh? Or a craving of the Spirit?" ... And she thanked him and walked away. She had her answer.

How about spending a few minutes praying instead of watching the tele...

What about doing a Bible study, instead of reading a magazine...

What about when that person at work frustrates you, and you begin to feel bitter and twisted??? Why don't you stop right then, and pray for them, and for their welfare...

Set your mind on things of the Spirit, and you will find that you'll begin to walk in the Spirit. V4 tells us that when we walk according to the Spirit, the righteous requirement of the Law, is getting fulfilled in us...

To be in Christ, is freedom... But freedom with responsibilities.

- Set your mind on things of the Spirit
- And walk in the Spirit

I think that's enough for this week... Next week, we'll be concentrating on the relationship.

Questions???

ⁱ Romans 5:12,18

ⁱⁱ Deut 10:16, 30:6, Jer 4:4, Rom 2:29

ⁱⁱⁱ ¹² So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.